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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0168
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000142

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TAGS: PHUM KWMN PGOV SOCI UZ

SUBJECT: WOMEN'S CRISIS CENTER OPENS IN BUKHARA WITH
DEMOCRACY COMMISSION SUPPORT -- POINTS TO NEED FOR MORE
DEMOCRACY COMMISSION FUNDS

REF: TASHKENT 80

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RICHARD NORLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a visit to Bukhara province on January 10 and 11, the Ambassador visited the "Oydin Nuri" ("Moonlight") Women's Crisis Center for victims of domestic violence, which recently opened in November 2007 with support from an Embassy Democracy Commission grant. During his visit to Bukhara province, the Ambassador also met with the governor of Bukhara province, religious leaders, and human rights activists (reftel). The opening of the shelter highlights the importance of the Democracy Commission grants, which remain one of the few sources available for funding NGOs and human rights groups in Uzbekistan. Unfortunately, the Embassy's Democracy Commission budget was cut by one-third this fiscal year. Given the program's importance for local NGOs, we believe that funding should be restored for next year. End summary.

SHELTER OPENS WITH SUPPORT FROM GOVERNMENT AND EMBASSY

¶2. (C) On January 10, the Ambassador visited the "Oydin Nuri" ("Moonlight") Women's Crisis Center for victims of domestic violence and was given a tour of its facilities by its director, Mavlida Salihova. The shelter currently has four rooms available for domestic violence victims, as well as additional rooms with computers and sewing machines that are used to provide vocational training to victims. Salihova estimated that most victims would stay at the shelter for about four months. The shelter officially opened in November 2007 with support from an Embassy Democracy Commission grant, which was used to renovate half of a building donated to Oydin Nuri by the Bukhara hokimiyyat (city administration). Previously, Salihova and her colleagues at Oydin Nuri had sheltered victims in their own homes.

OYDIN NURI PROVIDES TRAINING FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS

¶13. (C) Salihova reported having excellent relations with the local government, noting that the shelter was visited in December by a delegation of women from Bukhara's mahallas (neighborhood committees). Oydin Nuri also conducted trainings on domestic violence for law enforcement officials in each of Bukhara province's regions in 2007, pictures from which were prominently hanging from the shelter's bulletin board.

VICTIMS RELUCTANT TO LEAVE ABUSIVE SPOUSES

¶14. (C) Oydin Nuri has been providing assistance to domestic violence victims for many years. In 1999, it opened a hotline for domestic violence victims, which continues to operate and has since received approximately 9,000 calls. Oydin Nuri also has conducted research on domestic violence in Uzbekistan and has concluded that many victims are reluctant to leave abusive spouses. This is because wives are often financially dependent on their husbands (who control the finances in most Uzbek households). Local mahalla leaders, who often try to mediate marital disputes, also strongly discourage divorce, viewing it as disruptive to social harmony.

OYDIN NORI'S DOCUMENTARY ON "KELINS" AIRS ON BUKHARA TV

¶15. (C) Salihova told the Ambassador that she was interviewed recently on local Bukhara TV about domestic violence. In

addition, Oydin Nori has produced a documentary on the widespread abuse of "kelins" in Uzbekistan (Note: "Kelin," or recently married daughters-in-law, are expected to move in with their new husband's families and work long hours doing chores for their mothers-in-law for a certain period of time).

The tradition is almost universal in Uzbekistan and widely accepted. However, some kelins have reported being treated especially inhumanely by their in-laws, including being beaten and sexually abused. End note.) Salihova said that the documentary caused a stir after it was aired recently on local Bukharan TV, and she reported receiving many calls from current and former kelins thanking her for raising awareness of their plight.

POTENTIAL FOR SECOND DEMOCRACY COMMISSION GRANT

¶16. (C) During the tour, Salihova explained that the second half of the building donated by the hokimiyat remains unrenovated due to a lack of funds. Salihova intends to eventually use the second half of the building for additional living space for victims and to house recreational facilities for their children. The Ambassador encouraged Salihova to apply for another Democracy Commission grant to pay for the additional renovation.

BUKHARA LEGAL CENTER OPENS WITH DEMOCRACY COMMISSION SUPPORT

¶17. (C) The Ezgulik human rights organization, one of only two registered local human rights group in the country, also utilized Democracy Commission funding to open a legal clinic in Bukhara. At Ezgulik's annual conference on January 25, Ezgulik's Bukhara province Chairman Saidburkhon Qodirov reported that lawyers at the clinic have provided free legal consultations to area residents. He also thanked the Embassy for its generous support.

COMMENT: EMBASSY DEMOCRACY COMMISSION BUDGET SHOULD BE INCREASED

¶18. (C) The openings of the two centers in Bukhara underscore

the importance of Democracy Commission funding for Uzbekistan's struggling NGOs and human rights organizations. In particular, the opening of the Crisis Center provides a good example of how Democracy Commission funding can be combined with in-kind assistance from the local government. Since most international organizations were forced out of Uzbekistan following the 2005 Andijon events, the Democracy Commission grants have become an important source of funding for Uzbekistan's NGOs and human rights groups.

¶9. (C) Democracy Commission funding has become especially critical for local human rights groups, most of whom remain unregistered and are unlikely to receive in-kind assistance from the Government (Note: Authorities routinely deny registration to organizations whose activities they do not approve. End note). These local human rights "initiative groups" provide much of the day-to-day reporting on human rights which is later used by international human rights groups and Embassies in Tashkent. Without their efforts, the Embassy would be largely in the dark on human rights abuses in Uzbekistan. Although some of these groups receive support from international groups and from European Embassies, this support mostly takes the form of training held outside of Uzbekistan. From our discussions with local human rights groups, it is clear that they are increasingly becoming dependent upon Democracy Commission grants for projects each year to help cover their basic operating expenses. Although it is not the original mission of the Democracy Commission to

keep such organizations afloat, nevertheless, without its assistance, many of these organizations would not have the funds to continue operations. Given the especially harsh environment for local human rights groups in Uzbekistan and the importance of their work for our human rights reporting, we believe that the Democracy Commission should continue to support such organizations.

¶10. (C) Unfortunately, despite its importance to human rights groups and NGOs in Uzbekistan, the Embassy's Democracy Commission budget took a significant hit this fiscal year. The Embassy's total Democracy Commission budget declined from 300,000 dollars in fiscal year 2006-2007 to 200,000 dollars in fiscal year 2007-2008. We believe that funding for the 2008-2009 should be at least restored to 2006-2007 fiscal year-levels, if not increased further. We will use the additional funds to continue to support NGOs like Oydin Nori, as well as local human rights groups, without which we would not be able to objectively report on the human rights situation in Uzbekistan.

NORLAND